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fraternal, spiritual, free.

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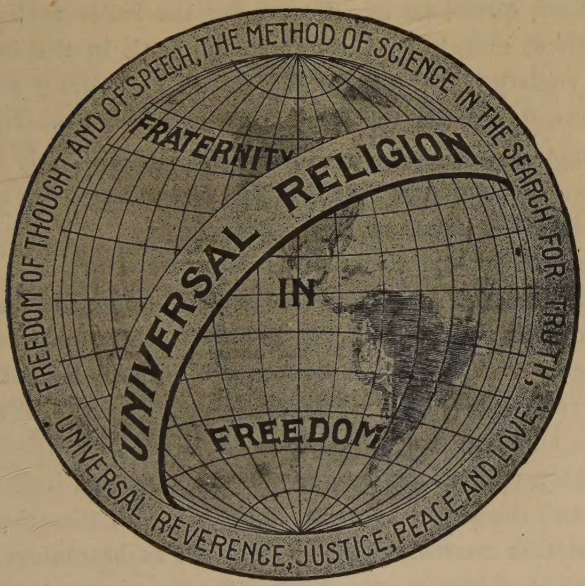

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VOLUME X.

With the present number this monthly enters upon its tenth year. As in the past, so in the future, its purpose will be to give expression to the wider view and loftier goal of an essentially progressive religious movement. To stand for uncompromising freedom of thought in religion, for the frank and fearless application of the method of science to all the great open questions in religion, for the fuller realization of the highest moral ideal of humanity, both in the individual and in society, for the spirit of genuine catholicity and reciprocal hospitality, for the attainment of an ever-widening free religious fellowship; to stand for these high and holy interests has been the particular object of this paper, and is its adequate justification for existence and continuance.

Denominational papers, popular magazines and periodicals have their respective functions and aims, but the organ of a non-sectarian or universal religion—fraternal, free, spiritual—meets a want and fulfills a purpose distinctly sui generis and therefore need offer no apology for its being. We have a cause to advocate and promote, a cause readily differentiated from all forms of Orthodoxy on the one hand and from Unitarianism and the Ethical Culture movement on the other. The pages of this monthly will be devoted, as heretofore, to the propagation of that cause. Among the new features which we promise our readers for 1902 may be mentioned the publication of a series of great discourses delivered by the three foremost pioneers of free, spiritual and universal religion—Francis Ellingwood Abbot, Octavius Brooks Frothingham and William James Potter. The series will begin with "My Creed; Mine, But Not Necessarily Yours," by Mr. Potter, to appear in the next number.

Delinquent subscribers will confer a great favor upon the publication committee by remitting their renewal subscription of one dollar at the earliest possible date to the treasurer, Samuel Collyer, 213 California Building, Tacoma.

WHAT IS A FREE CHURCH.*

BY ALFRED W. MARTIN.

The word church is derived from a Greek adjective signifying "belonging to the Lord," and was originally applied to the assembly of those who accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Master and Savior. But this exclusively Christian connotation of the word church has long since passed away. Dean Stanley, the greatest Christian scholar of the nineteenth century, entitled his famous work on the Jewish people and their religion "A history of the Jewish Church." Well known writers on Buddhism, such as Rhys Davids, have used the expression "Buddhist Church." Others, again, referring to Mohammedanism, have used the phrase "Mohammedan Church." As a result of this generic non-Christian usage, the Century Dictionary, among its definitions of the word church includes the following—"any religious organization not distinctively Christian." And any organization may be said to be religious that provides for the moral and spiritual education of its members, that exists to determine man's relation to the universe and the kind of conduct which that relationship prompts.

What then is a FREE religious organization? Perhaps it will help us to gain a more thorough and comprehensive idea of it if to begin with we consider what it is not. And I do this all the more readily because I find that misconceptions of the nature of a free church are quite as prevalent as correct conceptions. In the first place, then, a free religious organization, or free church, is not the counterpart of a medical dispensary, furnishing spiritual tonics and medicines once a week free of charge. Whatever may be said of churches existing without reference to monetary considerations, the fact remains that money, in the modern world, is an indispensable factor in the maintenance and management of a live church. And experience has made it plain that the bigger the church the bigger the money required to conduct its activities.

*A discourse spoken at Tacoma and Seattle, Sunday, Dec. 1st, 1901; written after delivery.

Secondly, a free church is not an institution whose auditorium seats are necessarily "free" to all. A price might be put upon every seat and yet the church be a free religious organization. In other words, the term "free" has nothing whatever to do with seats or with means or methods of financial support.

Thirdly, a free church is not to be confused with certain so-called "free-thought" clubs, "secular unions," and kindred organizations that stand for FREE THOUGHT indeed, but not always for FREEDOM OF THOUGHT as well. I have in mind a club of this description. As a result of their free thinking its members have adopted a code of beliefs, an anti-theological creed of "nine negations," to which they cling as resolutely as does the devoted Calvinist to the "five points." Whoever joins this free-thought club is expected to give his assent to this creed even as is the Presbyterian to the Westminster Confession. These people are free-thinkers, but they do not stand for freedom of thought which implies the privilege of being uncommitted to any statement whatever save such as the free method of universal verification shall establish, a method which provides for the absolutely unhampered unrestrained intellectual liberty of each individual soul. In a free church there is not only free thought but also freedom of thought.

Nor, again, in the fourth place, is freedom from moral responsibility, freedom to act acrording to caprice, impulse, passion, implied in the meaning of a free church. It stands for liberalism, not for libertinism. It insists not only on liberty, but also on the right use of liberty which is morality. Liberty, in itself, is the wild animal energy of our human nature and it acquires character and worth only when guided by reason and conscience. Left to itself liberty becomes an engine of destruction. Only as it operates in accordance with the Moral Law does it work for good.

Passing now, from these preliminary considerations, indicating what a free church is not, let us approach the positive aspect of our theme—what a free church is.

Just as the Declaration of Independence made the thirteen colonies politically "free and independent states," so a church becomes spiritually free and independent by the collective utterance of its members. It declares its independence of Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and all the other historical religions and their sects. Such a

declaration by no means implies hostility or antagonism or indifference to the truth and beauty which every religion contains. Thus it was that on November 27th, 1892, the "first Unitarian Society of Tacoma" became the "First Free Church of Tacoma" by the self-creative act of its constituency, the records showing that this declaration of independence was not the affirmation of the minister or of any other individual, but of the forty-five persons who voted for freedom on that day. Historically considered, the first free church was established at Toledo, Ohio, under the ministration of Dr. F. E. Abbot, August 20th, 1869, when the Toledo society declared their independence of Unitarianism, the Christian Confession, and every other symbol of spiritual bondage. Since then no other religious organizations, so far as I know, have made a declaration of independence properly entitling them to be regarded as free churches, except those at Seattle and Tacoma. True, at Salem and Worcester, in Massachusetts, there were so-called "free churches" but nowhere have I found any evidence to show that these societies by their collective voice declared themselves free and independent in religion. A church does not become free by the mere affirmation of its minister, or by the claim of any individual member, but only by the official declaration of the society as a whole.

The word "free," then, as applied to a religious organization has to do with its collective voice on the position it shall take in religion. Religion is a matter of thought, feeling and conduct concerning man's relation to the universe. Thought must determine what that relation is, feeling will take its character from the thought and both together find expression in conduct. The prime essential in religion, therefore, is thought. If that be wrong the resulting feeling and conduct will be wrong. Philip II. of Spain THOUGHT that God had ordained certain forms of worship and belief upon penalty of eternal torture to all dissenters. This thought generated the FEELING of fear followed by pity, tenderness and love; the thought and feeling combined produced the CONDUCT of the inquisition, designed, out of love for man, to save the greatest possible number of souls. Before one can have the FEELING of love toward God one must have some THOUGHT of what God is. Before one can LIVE the life of obedience to God one must KNOW something of

God and his laws. Thus the primary importance of thought in religion is obvious. A free church is therefore primarily concerned with freedom of religious THOUGHT.

But let no one think that on this account a free church is solely an intellectual institution. Primarily, but not wholly given over to thought is its just contention, for there can be no such thing as a purely intellectual religion. Sentiment, feeling, emotion—this is one of the root-facts of our consciousness and all the glory of our spiritual nature would vanish were man nothing more than an intellectual machine. Those deep spiritual facts that have their seat in the heart,—aspiration, reverence, worship, awe,—that crown our spiritual nature as with an aureole, these necessarily enter into any complete conception of religion and will have their place in a free church, acquiring greater content and deeper quality as man's thought, left free to find the truth, discovers new and more impressive occasion to feel and cherish all of these sentiments.

In a free church, then, all questions of religion will be settled, not by reference to any sacred book, creed, personage, or other external authority, but by free rational inquiry, by the agreement of all free minds, the method by which thus far all non-religious questions have been settled for the race. This characteristic of a free church differentiates it more than any other from the whole brood of orthodox churches. They settle all religious questions by appeal to the Bible; we, of the Free Church, subject even the conclusions of the Bible to free rational inquiry. And we do so all the more readily because so many biblical conclusions have been stamped erroneous by the discoveries of the modern world. We believe that thought should be left free to find out just what man's relation to the universe is—a problem that admits of gradual solution throughout an indefinite period—rather than be committed to the conclusions reached in a bygone age by an inconspicuous people in a remote corner of the earth. A free church is one that refuses to establish any boundaries for investigation, to fix any limits beyond which thought may not go; one that in its truth-seeking goes down into the most hidden depths, dredges the protoplasmic ooze of the most ancient seas, pierces the farthest sky with its telescope, turns its microscope upon the dust atoms of the air, stopping nowhere that thought can go to bring back the exact facts,

whatever they may be, shirking none, shrinking from none, coverng up and concealing none.

A Free Church is a spiritual anti-slavery society aiming at the spiritual emancipation of those not yet free, even as the historic anti-slavery societies aimed at the physical and social emancipation of the enslaved element in the nation. As the latter societies waged war against the bondage involved in the system of slavery, so the former wages war against dogmatism, ecclesiasticism, traditionalism, sectarianism, against whatever represents or tends toward spiritual bondage, in order that the human mind may be free to bring all its powers to bear on the great problems of morals and religion, free to solve the great open questions of deity, duty, destiny, questions closed until the dawn of the modern era and then reopened because of the revelations made by science.

The apostle Paul in one of his letters to Timothy said: "The word of God is not bound." Yet, with what unmistakable purpose, unconscious of any inconsistency, did he bind it to his own system of theology! In the middle ages the schoolmen bound it to the logic of Aristotle. Later on, Luther bound it to his translated edition of the Bible, and soon there came the procession of the Christian Protestant sects, each, in turn, binding the word of God, or truth, to its own particular interpretation of the Bible and each professing to be free! Was there ever a more curious anomaly. When Kossuth came to this country he remarked that there are many different kinds of freedom in the world. "There is," he said, "Russian freedom, German freedom, English freedom, American freedom, and then there is—freedom." So say we, recognizing with Kossuth the element of bondage in all these national types of freedom. And we see in religions what he noted in nations. There is Christian freedom, Buddhist freedom, Mohammedan freedom, Catholic freedom, Unitarian freedom, and then there is—freedom. Christian freedom means liberty within the pale of the Christian confession that Jesus is the Christ, the sole savior of mankind. Catholic freedom mean liberty to move within the domain of papal decrees and orders. Unitarian freedom means liberty within the precincts of the national Unitarian constitution. So long as there is any wall, however low or thin, there is no real freedom. Even in a palace one is imprisoned if one cannot get out. The

creed that binds a man may be as long as the Episcopalian, or, as short as the Unitarian. It may be an iron cable or a silken thread. but if it binds him he is bound, and though he raise the shout of freedom till doomsday it cannot break his chains.

Freedom is not Christian or Jewish or Hindu or Mohammedan, it is HUMAN, and to be free means to be at liberty to follow the laws of correct thinking and the facts of the cosmos, and only that organization which, by virtue of its collective vote for freedom and utter creedlessness, (carrying no condensed creed in its name,) offers such freedom, can be a strictly free religious society. It is easy enough to organize a sect and hedge it about with a creed. The difficult thing is to avoid doing that, to organize a society that shall not be a sect and not have a creed. This difficult task we have essayed. We are not a sect. We are sick of sectarianism with its presumptuous claims, its jealous exclusiveness, its internecine warfare, its disrupting contentions, its vulgar pride. We are a society, not a sect, not self-secluded from the rest of the religious world but forced apart because of sectarianism itself. working for its destruction because it is the foe of brotherhood and unity, a desideratum second only to truth.

We have no creed. We are tired of creeds and creedlets. We have seen, and still see, the mischief they make, even so tiny a creed as the present Unitarian constitution contains; a creedlet that makes it impossible for those seeking freedom to be a part of the Unitarian fellowship.

Why should we care so much for freedom? Why put it in the forefront of our movement and make it fundamental to the integrity and worth of our fellowship? Because it has an ancient and honored lineage, and despite all the hard usage to which it has been put it has good stuff in it still. And when we have done with it, others will take it up, speak it as it has never been spoken before and leave it as fresh as on the day of its birth. When freedom is reached the most radical of all bases is found because it goes to the root. There you are down below the creed-line, the color-line, the sect-line; down below every species of spiritual bondage—you have touched bottom. True, freedom is only a means, a condition, but as indispensable as air and light. Air is but a condition of vitality; not the breathing apparatus, but a condition

of its healthful operation. Light is but a condition of safe locomotion; not the motor-nerves, not eye-sight, only a condition, but so essential that without it the motor-nerves and muscles would be of small service. So freedom is a condition of mental activity and development. Mind is inherently active, give it room and it is bound to get ahead as does the plant in the sunlight. Orthodox preachers talk of the "aberrations of reason," but reason cannot go wrong, it is the paralysis, the imprisonment of reason that is responsible for most of the theological errors of the past.

We want freedom, then, because it is an indispensable condition of attaining truth, and truth, we know, is the parent of all real happiness, of all high virtue, and whosoever loves truth with all his soul has the very signet seal of God in his heart. If we assume we have all the truth there is, then, of course, we shall not need freedom, but if we concede that there is truth yet to be known, then we need to be free to investigate and find it. And while we insist on freedom of thought for ourselves we also insist on it for those who do not agree with us. I wish to contend for the freedom of the man who holds exactly opposite views to mine as well as for my own freedom. In accordance with that wish I took occasion a few years ago, when Mr. E. Benjamin Andrews was deposed from the presidency of Brown University because of his views on the currency question, to put in my humble word for his right to freedom, not because I shared his views, for I did not, but because I believe in the right of any man to express his honest thought, for only thus can the truth on unsettled questions be attained.

And this suggests another reason why we want freedom. It is because progress depends upon it inexorably. Where there is no freedom there can be no progress. See how for fifteen centuries Christendom stood still, the first progressive step being taken only when liberty and the Reformation brought Protestantism to light. And when, at length, Protestantism surrendered her original reliance on freedom of thought and the right of private judgment, falling back on BIBLICAL infallibility as its official substitute for PAPAL infallibility, another era of stagnation ensued, broken early in the nineteenth century by the proposal to substitute INTUITIONAL infallibility for its predecessor. But this latest criterion in due time was seen to involve spiritual bondage and inevitably to entail a

cessation of religious progress. And so there came THE NEW PROTESTANTISM, heralded by Abbot, Frothingham and Potter, protesting against all human infallibilities and pleading for the method of science, the method of free rational inquiry as the only hopeful means by which fallible man can arrive at truth, and thereby marking another milestone of progress. And just as fast as the method of science, the method of freedom gains sway over the minds enslaved to one or another of the three historic dogmatic methods, so fast will the world advance to unanimity of belief on the still open questions of religion, as it already has upon the once unsettled problems of geography and physics. We want freedom of thought then, for the sake of progress in the direction of more truth. And truth we want for the sake of human happiness and virtue, while these we want for the sake of the Commonwealth of Man, the social ideal, to realize which is the ultimate aim of human life.

Again, we want freedom for the sake of spiritual peace, the supreme spiritual boon that comes to a man only when he resolves to be himself and pay the price of standing without a chain, conscious that he has a right to sound all depths and penetrate all heights, that there are no popes or creeds or creedlets to which he must pay a reluctant homage, that his mind is a castle and that within its bastions peace and truth abide.

We want freedom for the sake of life too, tthat we may live our own true life and not a double life, that we may speak, and not with double tongue; speak, not conceal or stifle our convictions, for he who begins by stifling his convictions soon ends by having no convictions to stifle.

'Tis sometimes contended in certain quarters that all the freedom one could desire is available, that the cry for more freedom is out of date, that freedom is a "dead issue." Alas, the melancholy facts daily disprove the notion that there is "enough freedom to go round." If there were, we should not see the sickening spectacle of religious insincerity and hypocrisy, we should not see ministers and layman drugging conscience by giving public assent to what they privately deny. Why do certain Orthodox and Unitarian clergymen whom I know suppress their real religious convictions? Because to express them would cost them their pulpits. There is not freedom enough in their churches to permit the candid, fearless

utterance of radical thought without disastrous consequences to the speaker. Why do certain laymen I know attend Orthodox churches after frankly admitting their sympathy with our free religious movement? Because they are not free to go where they belong. They fear the loss of business and social position. Society has not enough freedom yet to enable them freely to follow their inmost promptings. It must cost them business or social success, or perhaps both. Plainly, then, it is not true that in this country every man is free to think as he chooses, speak his mind and live out his thought. He is free only with reservations. It is generally admitted that there is not freedom enough in Rome, in Constantinople, in St. Petersburg, in London. But why not note the same fact concerning Boston and New Orleans, San Francisco and Puget Sound? I speak from experience. Because I occupy an independent position, outside all sects great and small, because I hold decidedly unpopular views on the great questions of religious belief, I find I am quietly left out on occasions where I might be of some service, I find that my public usefulness is decidedly restricted in many different directions.

Given the cardinal characteristics of a free church, as I have outlined them, and it follows that there is one great service which it is empowered to render, a service of exceptional importance at a time when so many serious souls are suffering from religious restlessness and unsettledness. It provides a religious home for those who have been made homeless by doubt, investigation and disbelief. To how great an extent such homelessness prevails is indicated by the popular literature of the day. A people's dominant thought, temper, spirit, is always reflected in its best fiction. The works of Mrs. Ward, James Lane Allen, Gilbert Parker, do but voice the religious restlessness, doubt, instability, noble curiosity and intelligent inquiry of an ever increasing number of earnest men and women. How is this spiritual and intellectual activity met by the orthodox churches? First, with an injunction to desist from doubt which is sinful, and then with an appeal to return to revelation, the eternally valid satisfactory source of truth and peace. But to this the host of earnest doubting, inquiring souls replies, we asked you for bread and you give us a stone, we begged for proofs and you point us to what is itself in need of proof, we

implored you for light and you hand us the burnt out lamp of dogmattism. Just here it is that a Free Church meets these thoughtful doubters and inquirers. It reminds them of Jesus, himself one of the grandest doubters the world has ever seen, a doubter at each of the three crucial moments in his career. It recalls the gospel of Emerson: "Trust thyself, every heart vibrates to that iron string." It refers them to Frothingham's message of the virtue of doubt as a stepping stone to truth. It tells them of Abbot's inspiring lessons in the efficacy of the scientific method as the certain savior of the soul from the despair of agnosticism and the black void of atheism. It bids them be knights of the new chivalry. rescuing by the sword of thought the faith of their hearts. For thought is the deepest fact of our spiritual consciousness. Our religious feelings and sentiments take their character from our religious thoughts. Before one can LOVE God one must have some thought of what God is. Before one can LIVE the life of obedience of God one must have some thought of God and the divine laws to be obeyed.

Freely to think, following the laws of correct thinking and the facts of the cosmos; then, deeply to feel whatever sentiments our free thought engenders; and then, nobly to act out what our free thought and deep feeling together inspire,—this must ever constitute the supreme spiritual ideal of every free soul, while to aid in its realization must ever represent the supreme function of a Free Church.

WHAT IS BETTERNESS IN RELIGION?*

BY JOHN W. CHADWICK.

It is nothing absolute: it is something relative. Would Phillips Brooks's religion, as he preached it from the pulpit of his beautiful Trinity, have been any better for the negroes of the rice swamps and the cotton fields than that of their own Methodist exhorters? It would not have been half so good. Half! not a hundredth part! What could our administration of religion here do for the multitude of people who worship at the end of the next block? Less a good deal than theirs could do for us. I never get into the tide of the

*Extract from a recent discourse.

great happy swarm that comes surging out of St. Peter's every Sunday morning just at my hour without thanking God that these people also have their symbol of religion, and that, irrational and tawdry though it be, it is a symbol and a picture of the reality and seriousness of human life, of the goodness of God in the land of the living and beyond the gates of death, of the beauty of divine compassion, of the exigencies of a moral law. Things are good that serve a useful end. Whether a grand piano is better than a dredging shovel depends on what you want to do,—evoke an excellent music or dredge a muddy dock. You will get no music out of your shovel, no dredging out of your piano. The religions of the lowest races are better for those races than the religion of Martineau and Frothingham and Potter. The religious instincts of humanity in one respect are like the the green-eyed monster jealousy, —"they make the meat they feed on." They fashion the religions of the world according to the needs of men at different stages of their growth. And it is not as if any expression of religion were an expression of the absolute reality. At the best, we are only trying to say something,—not saying it right out sufficiently and perfectly. Our symbol may be a more refined and delicate symbol than some others, but it is a symbol still. And this ought to gender in our minds a wholesome modesty, and to lay a hushing finger on our lips.

EDITORIAL.

THE IDEAL OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

The supreme fact for Man is the truth of the cosmos, and the ideal of the intellect is to grasp and understand that truth. To establish an equation between the truth of thought and the truth of the cosmos is the sublime ideal to which human knowledge aspires But this ideal being by its own nature unrealizable, all that finite man can hope to attain is an ever closer approximation to the infinite Truth—the totality of real relations between real objective things. No human concept was ever wholly false. It contained at least a germ of truth and the realization of this fact acquaints us with the facts of the ethics of criticism. It is to search for the truth-germ in every system we discard, assured that what keeps and has kept error alive is naught but this germ of truth. To search

for it, then, and the more unpromising its appearance the more diligent our search—represents the duty we owe to every system of belief we decline to adopt. Be it Orthodoxy, Theosophy, Christian Science, Dresserism, Newcombism, or any other species of "new thought" or of old thought that, as a system, fails to win our endorsement, the virtue of appreciation will not be ours till we have sought the element of truth that still keeps the passing issue alive.

CHRISTIAN PRIDE.

The use that is being made of the word Christian as synonymous with all goodness is unfair, undiscriminating and a mark of ignorance of what other religions besides Christianity have taught the world. It is, moreover, a generator of spiritual conceit and pride, utterly foreign to the spirit and character of Jesus. Thus, for example, he who exhibits patience, is said to have the Christian virtue of patience. Another, who bears misfortune nobly, is described as having the Christian grace of endurance, and he who manifests generosity and helpfulness is spoken of as endowed with Christian charity. What right has any Christian to arrogate to his sect the exclusive possession of patience, endurance and charity? Was there no patience, no endurance, no charity in the world before the birth of Jesus? Do no other religions teach these virtues? Are they not to be found among people who know nothing of Jesus? Over two-thirds of the world's population is non-Christian, yet, where, in non-Christian countries, are these virtues unknown? A mere glance at the Bibles of the non-Christian religions lays bare the unwarranted and false assumption that these virtues are rightly called Christian. Let there be an end, then, of this Christian pride, exclusiveness and arrogance, so contradictory to the gospel of Jesus. The moral and religious sentiments belong to no one religion alone, they are universal. The sacred scriptures of the great religions furnish the proof of it.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD.

TACOMA.

At a recent meeting of the trustees of the First Free Church it was unanimously voted to arrange for the transformation of the church auditorium into a hall for entertainments, receptions, etc.,

and to be known as the "Tacoma Music Hall." Architect Darmer has drafted plans for the appropriate remodelling of the building and it is expected that the auditorium will be ready for rental by the first week of the new year. The lower room has been recarpeted, recalcimined, revarnished and thoroughly renovated for the Sunday School sessions and for such other purposes as occasion may require. The removal of the congregation to the Tacoma theatre is a step from which there will be no retreat. They have moved to larger quarters for a larger work, and they intend to stay and wish this fact to be clearly understood by the general public.

Although the weekly expenses of the church are considerably greater than before, it is gratifying to note that the income is proportionately larger, enabling the treasurer to meet the obligations of the church as promptly as heretofore.

The ninth annual "Roll-Call Sociable" is to be held January 6th and promises to be "the best ever." In our next issue we hope to publish a report of the proceedings.

At the Christmas season the church was again remembered by Mr. S. A. Hartwell of Louisville, Ky., who sent twenty dollars to the treasurer; by Mr. John Walsh of Skagway, Alaska, who sent ten dollars for the church treasury and two dollars for the annual Sunday School festival; and by Mr. Gordon Bowles of Tacoma, who donated five dollars to the Sunday School festival fund.

SEATTLE.

The organization of a Woman's Union in connection with the Society for Universal Religion is the latest undertaking to be reported. The initial meeting for organization was held Sunday evening, Dec, 1st, and was attended by fifty ladies, who voted to appoint a committee of three on constitution and by-laws, the report to be heard on the following Sunday. Mesdames Arthur, Davies and Epler were duly appointed and presented an admirable report. After its unanimous adoption the election of officers was held, resulting as follows: For president, Mrs. J. M. E. Atkinson; for vice president. Mrs. W. F. Epler; for secretary, Mrs. Young; for treasurer, Mrs. Griffith Davies; for auditor, Mrs. M. Kelly.

On Sunday evening, January 12th, the third annual festival of the Society will be held in Elks' Hall. A fine programme is being arranged, refreshments will be served and a thoroughly enjoyable evening will be spent. The next number will contain a brief report of the celebration.

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